Local patrons needed to sustain local stores

City grocery hungry for city shoppers

FILE, LON HORWEDEL, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Nicolas Arreola stands with his son Chris in their downtown Ypsilanti grocery store, Dos Hermanos. The store recently celebrated its first anniversary.

Nicolas Arreola recently celebrated a milestone – the one-year anniversary of his downtown Ypsilanti grocery, Dos Hermanos.

When people talk about the economy, it's often done in abstract terms of unemployment rates and consumer confidence surveys. But fundamentally, the economy is built one entrepreneur, one business, one job at a time.

This is visible most dramatically close to home. In Ypsilanti – which has struggled for years to revitalize its downtown business district – one shop can make a big difference.

In Arreola's case, the difference is even more notable: His is the only traditional grocery within the city of Ypsilanti. The Ypsilanti Food-Co-Op on River Street and a few party stores sell some groceries, but Dos Hermanos includes a meat market, produce and bread, along with a wide variety of Mexican specialty foods. He hopes to open a deli as well.

Ypsilanti officials have said the lack of a grocery store has been a frequent complaint from residents, but Arreola says people seem to be buying less. That's a bad sign, though in some ways, not surprising. Earlier this year, a study of Ypsilanti residents reported that only 7 percent of respondents shopped downtown – a startlingly low number.

Businesses can't survive without customers, whether they're relatively new ones like Dos Hermanos or The Rocket toy store, or older anchors like Haab's, Puffer Red's and Materials Unlimited.

We should all celebrate the success of enterprises that support our local economy. Even better when we show our support by actually shopping at local stores.